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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Cross-Straight Talks

¶1. Summary: On June 12, Taiwan's print media gave extensive coverage to the historic talks between Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) on improved cross-Straight relations. News coverage also focused on the aftermath of a collision between a Taiwan fishing boat and a Japanese frigate near the Tiaoyutai islands Tuesday. Two English-language dailies -- the pro-independence "Taipei Times" and the pro-unification "China Post" -- also ran a Reuters news story filed from Washington, which said Taiwan's representative to the U.S. Joseph Wu has urged the U.S. government to approve the sale of F-16 fighter jets as soon as possible.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a news analysis in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" said the main goal of the SEF-ARATS talks should be resuming the systematic interaction between Taipei and Beijing, instead of negotiating technical issues.

An op-ed in the "China Times" urged Taiwan to grasp the opportunity to make a breakthrough in cross-Straight relations. An editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" criticized Ma Ying-jeou's administration for compromising Taiwan's sovereignty in its recent policies. End summary.

A) "Only [When Both Sides of the Strait] Resume a Systematic Exchange of Visits Can [Taipei and Beijing] Take [Their Interaction and Dialogue] Seriously"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] analyzed (6/12):

"... This time, Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) finally took the opportunity to resume normal dialogue. [Taiwan's President] Ma Ying-jeou and [SEF Chairman] Chiang Pin-kun should understand that launching weekend charter flights and opening up Taiwan to mainland tourists are just agreements on technical issues.

Resuming a systematic exchange of visits between SEF and ARATS would be the most historically significant achievement of the meeting between Chiang and [ARATS Chairman] Chen [Yunlin], if it is feasible.

"However, one hand cannot clap. Chiang threw out the suggestion of resuming the exchange of visits between SEF and ARATS in the informal press conference [held in Beijing] on Wednesday night...Do the Chinese Communist high-level [officials] just want to maintain the good atmosphere for a short period, or do they really expect both sides of the Strait to stay on the road of normalized interaction for the long run? The answers to these questions will not only have influence on the consensus which the "Chiang-Chen meeting" might reach, but will also determine the final achievements of the Chiang-Chen meeting."

B) "Ten Years to Sharpen a Sword"

Yang Yu-wen, a freelance writer, opined in the centrist, KMT-leaning

"China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (6/12):

"Since both sides of the Strait started systematic negotiations, two hiatuses in the talks were caused by disagreement over the 'one-China principle.' The second resumption [of the dialogue across the Strait] is going to proceed. Compared with the resumption of [the first] dialogue which was held ten years ago, what has changed is the political and economic power of both sides of the Strait, respectively. What has not changed is that the ball is still in Beijing's court, whose goal is to push [Taiwan] toward political negotiation. ...

"China has never been in such circumstances in almost one hundred years. Its national power is rising. At the same time, it is improving relations with neighboring countries, especially when its relations with Russia, Japan and South Korea are concurrently in strategic cooperation and mutually beneficial partnership. What is even more important is, the final result of the United States Presidential election will only be known at the end of the year and [the United States'] foreign policy will only be clear by mid next year. The influence of the United States on the situation in East Asia and on cross-Straits relations will be diminished during this time. Taiwan, after having experienced strongman and populist politics, is in a nadir in which political and economic power is declining and the government's governing capability is weak. Now that [Chinese President] Hu Jintao has the upper hand, how could Taiwan fail to accelerate the tempo and grasp an opportunity which barely occurs once in a hundred years to realize the most significant advancement of cross-Straits relations for the last thirty years?

C) "The Unification Wing Comes to Power; Taiwan's Sovereignty Faces an Unprecedented Crisis"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (6/12):

"After taking office, Ma's administration is publicly walking a course of leaning towards China and ultimate unification, a course filled with policies and moves that have downgraded our sovereignty. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) revealed recently that it is implementing measures of 'de-Taiwanification.' Minister of Foreign Affairs Francisco Ou also revealed that he gave clear instructions to MOFA staff in a speech, saying that there will be adjustment in the new government's foreign policy, with consideration toward not disrupting the benign development of cross-Straits relations. After President Ma advocated a 'diplomatic truce' in his inauguration speech, he constantly repeated the same rhetoric while receiving foreign guests. It is obvious that 'cross-Straits relations trumping foreign affairs' has been set as the new government's policy. The new government's resumption of dialogue with China is a corollary to this policy. ...

"From the reality that, externally, the new government is retreating and surrendering spontaneously on the diplomatic battlefield and proceeding in negotiating between the two countries [Taiwan and China] and introducing China's influence into Taiwan; internally, [the new government] is in haste to change the roadmap of Taiwan-centric consciousness and efface the name of Taiwan, we know that after the unification wing came to power, Taiwan's sovereignty has actually been facing an unprecedented crisis. The Taiwan people should think about how to do our utmost to turn the tide in order to save Taiwan at this critical juncture of life and death."

YOUNG